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ABSTRACT

Critical changes in gifted education over the past century have included establishment of a credible research data base, an expanded definition of giftedness, and expansion of gifted programming to serve a greater number and diversity of students. The traditional special education approach to gifted education is a static, one-way process and has demonstrated specific problems for gifted education in the areas of identification, programming, and categorical confusion. Gifted education in Canada is being heavily impacted by such broad-based movements as the regular education initiative, inclusive education, and school restructuring. Ideally, in the inclusive school, instructional provisions are individualized and student-centered. Student diversity is celebrated, and teachers and related professionals develop cooperative and collaborative relationships. (Contains 13 references.) (DB)

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Gifted, Special and Inclusive Education: Past, Present and Future Promise

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For many school districts and divisions across Canada, the current decade is one characterized by significant change (Porter & Richler, 1991). Broad-based movements such as the *Regular Education Initiative*, *Inclusive Education*, and *RestructuringSchools* are forcing educators across the country to re-examine all aspects of educational practice from instructional delivery to school organization and structure (Sailor, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Villa, Thousand, Stainback, & Stainback, 1992; Weiderholt, 1989). Accordingly, gifted education and the way it is delivered and conceptualized is currently being reviewed (Treffinger, 1991; Gallagher, 1991).

Historical Milestones in Gifted Education

The summary chart reveals those factors and/or individuals having a major influence on the development of identification instruments and gifted education programs over the century.

Historical Milestones in Gifted Education

YEAR	GIFTED PROGRAMS EMPHASIS	INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT
1869	• Galton-Hereditary Genius	Early sensory measurement of intelligence
1925-1959	• Terman Studies • Hollingsworth Studies	Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales
1957-1962	• Post Sputnik intellectually gifted programs • National Merit Scholarships	Wechsler Scales norm-referenced achievement tests scholastic aptitute tests
1962-1972	• Broadened definition includes creativity, divergent thinking • Marland's Definition	Guilford, Meeker and Torrance Tests of Creativity Renzulli Teacher Nomination Forms
1980-1990s	• Expanded Programs • More emphasis on special populations	Renzulli, Baldwin, Treffinger, Rimm Underchievement I.D.

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Critical changes during this time include: (1) a shift in emphasis from genetic endowment to environmental influences on the actualization of giftedness; (2) the establishment of a credible research data base; (3) societal recognition of the valuable contributions of gifted individuals; (4) an expanded definition of giftedness from a narrow focus on IQ measures to a broadened focus including creativity, leadership, academic achievement, psychomotor ability, intelligence, and visual and performing arts; (5) expansion of gifted programming to serve a greater number and diversity of students.

The Special Education Approach

Despite the fact that gifted education has maintained a relatively separate evolutionary path within the schools, the more recent decades have seen an increased alignment with special education. Indeed many school districts have adopted the traditional *Special Education Approach* as a primary method of service delivery for gifted students. As shown in Figure 1, the *Special Education Approach* is a static, one-way process consisting of five elements or boxes.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The system becomes activated when the regular classroom teacher prepares a formal referral on an individual student which is forwarded to the principal, and in most cases, this is passed along to central administration. Central office or outside experts such as the school psychologist carry out specialized testing, and once all the relevant data has been compiled a diagnosis according to a recognized categorical affiliation such as gifted or learning disabled is determined. Experts, school personnel, and often parents then meet to consider appropriate specialized placement, and an individual education plan is developed. The special class teacher is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the program.

The Legacy of a Special Education Approach on Gifted Education

The *Special Education Approach* has served school systems and children with exceptional learning needs well in the past, and it seems reasonable, to have adopted a similar system of procedures to serve the needs of students who are of high ability. Nevertheless, the legacy of adopting the *Special Education Approach* to gifted education has not been entirely positive. Identification: Identification practices have been found to be particularly remiss. Even though most school districts

support and have adopted a multi-dimensional and/or expanded definition of giftedness, this is not reflected in identification procedures. The administration of an individual intelligence test such as the WISC-R and some measure of achievement is standard for many school divisions. Moreover, testing that is carried out may not be appropriate for the intended purpose, and having outside experts do the testing is a very costly process. Teachers have often complained that too much of the relatively limited funding for gifted education is tied up in testing that has minimal educational relevance. In comparison with other areas of exceptionality it is true that for gifted students there is a much greater focus on testing for labelling as opposed to assessment to determine individual learning needs.

Programming: A *Special Education Approach* has implications for programming as well. As it can be seen in Figure 1, an individual must first successfully make it through the first four boxes before programming concerns are dealt with. The wait factor from referral to special program could range from a period of days to months. Meanwhile what happens with the child? The approach assumes that gifted individuals must have specialized testing, teachers and programs to appropriately serve their unique learning needs. A dual system of regular and special education divides teaching responsibility, and typically once a referral is made out, responsibility for the student shifts over to special education. Decades of operation under this kind of a system has seriously disenfranchised the regular classroom teacher's role in meeting a diversity of student learning needs. The widespread practice of implementing special pull-out programs or segregated classes for gifted students has resulted in an artificial separation of regular and gifted curriculum and programs. Since funding for gifted education is more restricted than for other areas of special education, programs may not be available to the child until grade four and typically are not offered beyond grade nine. Programs are typically available to very few students, and most often it is only the intellectually or academically gifted student that gets identified and placed. Moreover, in times of economic restraint it is the unfortunate reality that gifted programs are the first to be cut.

Categorical Confusion: Services for special education have traditionally been organized according to discrete categorical designations (Presseisen, 1991). With an expanded view of giftedness emerging, schools have recently been significantly challenged to provide service for an ever increasing number of subgroups of gifted students including Disadvantaged Gifted, Bored Gifted, Suicidal Gifted, Gifted Handicapped, Language Minority Gifted, At-risk Gifted, and Underachieving Gifted. The gifted/learning disabled category is perhaps the the best known, although a recent count shows that over the past 20 years over 23 different terms have been reported. The one way *Special Education Approach* offers no alternatives beyond the provision of 23 different programs which is most unlikely, or not offering any specialized programming. Programs could conceivably be combined but what expertise should the special teacher have, and what programs should be provided?

Statistics: The long term consequences of the legacy of a *Special Education Approach* are most alarmingly noted in recent reports and statistics. The comprehensive U. S. report *A Nation at Risk* (1983), for example, indicated that over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school. Other studies have confirmed this trend of underachievement or underutiliaztion of gifted potential (Nyquist, 1973; Seeley, 1985).

Gifted Education in the Future

The future of gifted education may be significantly influenced by the current school reform movements, and particularly the trend toward inclusive schooling. At the base of this movement is the principle that unlike previous special education trends such as integration, mainstreaming and normalization, inclusive education demands changes not only for special education services but for the regular system as well. What has been separately developed according to dual systems of regular and special education must be fully restructured into a unified system of education that appropriately meets the needs of all students. Expertise that was developed in special education classrooms must become interwoven with that found in general education, and instruction is geared to meet the individual learning needs of the student.

What will inclusive schools be like for gifted students? At this time it is probably too soon to tell. Nevertheless current leaders in inclusive education have attempted to delineate some of the major distinctions between traditional educational and contemporary practice (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). Instructional provisions will be student-centered with individualization provided for all students, as opposed to only the identified students. Student diversity will be celebrated by recognizing that student characteristics do not fit into simple dichotomies but rather can be configured as a continuum. Testing and assessment will be focused on determination of instructional needs as opposed to identification and labeling, and teachers will become the essential mediators of this process. Instructional strategies will be selected and implemented to accommodate student learning needs as opposed to some specified category, and a wide range of curricular options and differentiated instruction will be available, as opposed to the narrow boundaries that categorical affiliation have established. The traditional hierarchical structure and artificial barriers that currently exist between teachers and their professional colleagues will be replaced by a new system of cooperative and collaborative relationships. Finally, the artificial world of special classes will be replaced with inclusive communities where all students are welcomed and supported.

In conclusion, gifted education will be impacted by the general inclusive education initiative. Limitations and artificial barriers that have been imposed by the traditional *Special Education Approach* to service delivery would be eliminated in many dimensions of educational practice by moving toward contemporary thinking and practice in our schools.

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